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Mideast Balance of Power at Issue

Analysts Fear Impact of Iran-Iraq War Will Spread

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WASHINGTON—American officials expressed concern Wednesday that Iran, stymied at least temporarily in its invasion of southern Iraq, may strike northward toward the Iraqi capital of Baghdad or bomb Kuwait as punishment for that oil-rich sheikdom's support of its Arab neighbor.

That in turn could lead Iraq to renew its bombing raids on Iran's huge oil-loading station at Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, U.S. analysts said. Air raids last week drove Japanese and British tankers away from the island, and further attacks could virtually shut down the facility, crimping the flow of Iranian oil to world markets.

Thus, despite the present lull in fighting, American specialists fear that the effects of the 22-month-old Iran-Iraq war will get worse before they get better. And these officials continue to expect that the war will have a greater impact on U.S. interests than the more heavily publicized Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Whatever the outcome, the war—latest of the racial and religious battles along the Tigris River that go back at least 13 centuries—will affect.

—The future of the Iranian regime, which has again begun to struggle with the question of who will succeed the 81-year-old Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

—The regional balance in the Persian Gulf region, where Iran is seeking to reassert its influence through military power, as well as by stirring Shia Muslim radicalism and by broader appeals to Muslim fundamentalism.

—Israeli and U.S. interests in the Mideast, since Khomeini has been insisting that "the road to Jerusalem" lies through Iraq.

—The worldwide cost of oil. Iran has already defied

and total victory over Iraq could jeopardize the recent relative stability in international energy affairs.

Tehran's forces in southern Iraq are still regrouping after having been pushed back to within two miles of the border by Iraqi counterattacks, U.S. officials said Wednesday. Forward Iranian units had penetrated 15 miles into Iraq, to the banks of the Shattal Arab waterway near Basra, in their initial thrust.

Facing possible stalemate there, one official said. "Khomeini will have to show victory over somebody for political reasons." So U.S. analysts anticipate Iranian strikes elsewhere out of frustration.

A thrust toward Baghdad would probably start from the Iranian border town of Qasr-Shirin, about 80 miles from the Iraqi capital, one intelligence source said. U.S. reconnaissance photos are being studied for signs of redevelopment or Iranian forces, which could occur quickly, he said.

The analysts do not believe that Khomeini will be satisfied until Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is toppled. Hussein has allegedly persecuted Khomeini's fellow Shia Muslims in Iraq and threw Khomeini himself out of Iraq after he had been exiled by the now-deceased Shaw of Iran. Hussein, although a Muslim, belongs to the Sunni sect.

Consolidation of Power

Kuwait has already been bombed three times by Iranian planes because it aided Iraq with money and arms, and it was warned again last week by Iran's Speaker of Parliament, the Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, that it will be punished if the aid is not stopped immediately. While air raids are most likely, Iran could also make punitive naval attacks, officials said.

Iran also flexed its muscles earlier this month at the OPEC meeting in

crease its oil production from the present level of about 2.2 million barrels a day to 3 million barrels a day in order to augment its national income.

Saudi Arabia objected, saying that higher Iranian production would increase supplies and undercut the \$34-a-barrel price it wants OPEC to maintain. Iran, according to State Department officials, then invited the Saudis to cut back their 7 million barrel-a-day output. The Saudis declined, and the OPEC meeting in Vienna recessed in disarray.

Even without a major victory in the war against Iraq, Iran will probably grow bolder in OPEC as it seeks to gain greater revenues to restore its national economy, analysts here said.

Internally, a war victory will consolidate the rule of Iran's fundamentalist clergy who are aligned with Khomeini. But there is disagreement on what kind of regime will follow "the supreme religious leader," who is periodically reported to be ill.

U.S. intelligence analysts and State Department officials generally believe that the mullahs are firmly in control and will continue to rule after Khomeini departs, regardless of the outcome of the war.

"I don't necessarily share that view," said Richard Helms, former CIA chief and former U.S. ambassador to Iran.

"Khomeini is seen as a saint by the masses," Helms said, "but there are no saints coming up to follow him. I think we'll see, after Khomeini, a resurgence of those elements who want change." Among the players in future power struggles, he said, would probably be the Iranian army, the Revolutionary Guards and the now-underground leftist Mujahedeen, with the Soviets "very busy working through highly placed mullahs on their payroll," Helms said.

State Department officials said they consider the Helms outlook, which they term the "chaos scenario," less probable today than it was a year ago.

Radical-Moderate Struggle

The struggle will be between radical and moderate religious leaders. Some officials believe that this struggle is already